

HARPSWELL BULLETIN

News for Harpswell Residents and Property Owners from the Town Office – August 2004

Town Website: www.curtislibrary.com/harpsgov.htm

ASSESSING UPDATE

The Selectmen/Assessors have been developing some new assessing methods for use in the 2004 property valuation, the basis for the tax bills that will be mailed in September. Special valuations for common parcels and a considerable number of parcels that had been assigned adjustments to value, down or up, on a fixed percentage basis will be eliminated. As a result, there will be fewer distinctions between the valuations of similar or adjacent parcels. Valuations will move closer to the actual market values and away from arbitrary adjustments.

A limited number of special adjustments will continue such as for lots on which nothing can be built, wetlands, cemeteries and lots with rights-of-way across them. In connection with the 2005 assessment, property owners of parcels considered to be unbuildable will be asked to provide information supporting the lower valuation.

The Town will continue to have many “neighborhoods,” areas in which lots are grouped together because of their being subject to the same or similar market conditions. However, in the revaluation, which will be used to support the 2005 assessments, the number of neighborhoods is expected to be reduced.

REVALUATION

The townwide revaluation being conducted by Vision Appraisal is well underway. Company representatives began visiting properties in the North Harpswell area in early June and are working their way down Harpswell Neck then on to Great Island, Orr’s and Bailey Islands. For identification purposes, listers wear photo identification badges, carry letters of authorization from the Town and use vehicles marked with signage.

The Town Office has received some questions about the revaluation.

Do I have to let Vision Appraisal in my home?

The decision to let a representative in your home is entirely up to the property owner. However, if you chose not to let a representative in, and you disagree with the assessment of your structure, you may jeopardize your ability to apply for or be granted an abatement in the future.

What information will be posted on a website?

Much of the revaluation information may be posted on the website that Vision Appraisal will host for the Town; however, due to considerable feedback received from property owners the Selectmen are planning to withhold photographs and sketch plans from appearing on that website. The information will be available to the public at the Town Office, as it has been for many years.

What is a revaluation?

A revaluation is the process of conducting the data collection and market analysis necessary to equalize the values of all properties within a municipality for the purpose of fairly distributing the tax burden. The revaluation does not mean that taxes will increase. It is used to determine the relative value of properties used in distributing the tax burden. The overall tax burden results from spending decisions not valuation.

Why is a revaluation needed?

The State of Maine requires that cities and towns perform a revaluation so that all properties can be brought to current market value and contribute an equitable portion of the total tax burden. Harpswell is required now to carry out this process. Records show that the valuations done by the town are well below those done by the state, suggesting that Assessors need to take into account a rapidly changing market.

What is market value and who determines my property value?

Market value is determined by the activity in the real estate market and the general economy. The value of your property is based on an analysis of the entire market for the full two calendar years before the completion of the revaluation project. The market can generally be defined as the values derived from recent arm's length transactions in Harpswell.

It is the appraiser's job to research and analyze the values in any particular area or neighborhood. The appraiser has specific guidelines to follow. Factors that are examined for each property include location, size, quality of construction, age of improvements, topography, utilities, zoning restrictions, if any.

What happens during a revaluation?

A physical inspection of both the interior and exterior of each property may be conducted, where building dimensions and characteristics are noted. While the data collection phase is going on, appraisers are studying the sales and determining where the actual increases and decreases in value are occurring. This study of recent property sales allows comparisons to be made and appraisers to establish parameters to estimate the value of property that has not been sold. The appraisers then review this collected data and apply the determining factors of the sales analysis to come up with a value of each property. Each property owner receives an individual notice of the proposed new assessment. Property owners can also review the entire public assessed values, so that the property owner can see what the values are around his/her property. All property owners are given the opportunity to discuss their values with the appraisal staff by scheduling an appointment within the period that has been set for those appointments (informal hearings).

What is an informal hearing?

Toward the end of the revaluation, every homeowner will receive a notice of their proposed valuation based on the analysis performed. If homeowners have a question or concern about the proposed valuation they are asked to call Vision to set up a date and time to meet and discuss the valuation process and answer any questions the homeowner may have. A Hearing Officer will determine if a review of the property is necessary. All changes to value that occur due to a hearing will be reflected in the assessment determined by the Assessors after hearings are complete.

If I disagree with my assessment after a hearing, what are my options?

If any property owner believes the assessment of their property is in excess of its fair market value they should first notify the Assessors' Office. An abatement application must be filed, and the Selectmen who are the Assessors in Harpswell will make the final decision. The Selectmen/Assessor decision may be appealed to the Cumberland County Commissioners. An appeal of the County Commissioners' decision may then be taken to Superior Court.

When are the valuation figures final?

After the hearing phase, Vision Appraisal will submit its final assessed values to the Selectmen/Board of Assessors for the Selectmen to consider, revise as necessary, approve and adopt. Vision Appraisal will not present its assessment figures to the Selectmen until late summer of 2005. It is anticipated that the 2005 tax bills will be based on the Vision Appraisal valuation figures.

RECREATION OFFERINGS

Adult Programs—New Digital Photography Workshops

Dave Higgins will be offering the following three digital photography courses at the Town Office:

Camera Techniques Course I (4-week course, day or night session)

Tuesday, September 21 – October 12 Day Session: 3:15 – 5:15 Night Session: 6:15 – 8:15

This beginner's course will emphasize how to use your camera including exposure modes, white balance, image transfer and resolution. The course will cover photographing people, places and things using photographic compositional techniques. Preparing images for the printer, web pages, e-mail and multimedia will also be covered.

Image Processing Course II (4-week course, day or night session)

Tuesday, October 19 – November 9 Day Session: 3:15 – 5:15 Night Session: 6:15 – 8:15

This course will demonstrate how to use PhotoShop Elements and how to perform crops, tonal adjustments and basic retouching plus output to the printer for maximum quality and preparation of images for the internet and multimedia. Instruction will include how to make contact sheets, multiple image layouts and web galleries. A tutorial CD will be included.

Materials: Students should have a digital camera and home computer with PhotoShop Elements software.

Intermediate Techniques Course III (4-week course, day or night session)

Tuesday, November 16 – December 7 Day Session: 3:15 – 5:15 Night Session: 6:15 – 8:15

Students will learn advanced photographic techniques, panorama and image blending. This course will emphasize the use of layers and more advanced PhotoShop tools and techniques. There will be lectures on lights, how to create an image and style versus technique.

Materials: Students should have a digital camera and home computer with PhotoShop Elements software.

All classes are \$95.00 per session and open to ages 15 and up. To sign up please send a check payable to the Town of Harpswell indicating which course and which session you will be attending. If you have any questions, please contact the Harpswell Recreation Department at 833-5771.

Leaf Peeping Plus: Details will be out soon on a bus trip to North Conway on Friday, October 1st from 8am to 5pm. The trip will include leaf peeping, scenic railway ride and a picnic at Grafton Notch.

Cliff Trail: Through extraordinary volunteer efforts the Town has improved the walking loop trail that starts behind the Town Office and Community TV station. You will find improved signage, a recently-clipped path, improved crossings over muddy low spots and an overall better walking experience. If you hurry, you may still yet see the young Osprey in their nest on the cliff. Parking is available at the Town Office.

Upcoming Children's Programs

Fall and Winter Music and Movement Classes for newborns through age 7. The six classes are taught by Tammi Lareau at the Bowdoin College Children's Center except the grandparent and grandchild class will be held at the 55 Plus Center. Fall sessions begin on September 17. Winter session begins on November 12. Fees range from \$32 to \$64. Flyers will be available shortly.

Fall brings **Pee Wee Soccer** for the 3-6 year old set. The program is eight Saturdays beginning September 11 from 9-10 am at the Trufant-Summerton Ball Field. The registration fee is \$10. Participants will receive a T-shirt and a coupon for a free soccer ball. Flyers are available.

Harpswell Harriers Cross Country Running begins on September 8 at Harpswell Islands School at 3:50 pm. Runners meet Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Ages 5-12. Fee is \$10. Flyers are available.

CHANGING PERSONNEL AT THE TOWN OFFICE

Former Deputy Town Administrator **Jay Chace** was recently promoted to the position of Town Planner replacing Noel Musson who left to take a job in the private sector. Jay will be completing his master's degree in Land Use Planning from the Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service at the University of Southern Maine and is well suited to guide the Town's future planning efforts.

Frank True has been named the new Fire Warden for the Town of Harpswell following Dick Wyer's announcement that he would be stepping down after many, many years of service. Dick's outstanding service will be hard to replace, but Frank is well qualified with his experience as Deputy Fire Chief for Harpswell Neck and as a professional fire fighter for the Brunswick Naval Air Station.

The Board of Selectmen appointed **Todd Steinman** as the Town's new Harbormaster on July 29. As a self-employed fisherman Todd has many years experience navigating the waters of Casco Bay. His responsibilities will include but not be limited to administering the Harbor and Waterfront Ordinance for the Town with primary emphasis on reviewing requests for new moorings and determining mooring placements.

Curt Lebel joined our staff several months ago in the Assessing Office. His primary responsibility has been to visit all new construction and renovation sites in Harpswell over the past year to gather data for assessment purposes. He has quickly become proficient in assessing matters and is planning to become certified in the assessing field.

LOCAL ART TO BE DISPLAYED AT THE TOWN OFFICE

Harpswell artists will have an opportunity to display work in the lobby hallways at the Town Office on a monthly rotating basis. For more information and an application, please e-mail harpswellrec@zwi.net or send a stamped self-addressed envelope to Town of Harpswell, Recreation Department, P.O. Box 39, Harpswell, ME 04079. There is no cost.

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PRESORT
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Harpswell, ME 04079

Resident
Bailey Island, ME 04003

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